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MILTON AND THE ARISTOTELIAN DEFINITION OF TRAGEDY.

All who have studied the history of the Catharsis controversy are aware that Milton has to be recognized as one of the precursors of Weil and Bernays, and that a pathological interpretation of *κάθαρσις* is implied in the well-known passage which forms the opening of the preface to *Samson Agonistes*:—

'Tragedy, as it was antiently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems; therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions; that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion; for so in physic things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humours.'

On this Bernays (*Zwei Abh.* p. 95) remarks with pardonable satisfaction, 'Das homöopathische Gleichniss zeigt, wie nahe er dem Richtigen war.' As the language of Milton's illustration has, if I am not mistaken, a Helmontistic colouring, the actual form of his statement may very well be his own. The great interest it has for us is in the evidence it supplies that in Milton's view the Aristotelian *κάθαρσις παθημάτων* was to be conceived as analogous to a bodily process, that the term was borrowed from medicine rather than religion, and that it meant 'purgatio' in its medical sense, and not, as Heinsius and Goulston had supposed, in its ceremonial sense of 'lustratio' or 'expiatio'—in other words that a great poet found no difficulty

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in accepting the initial assumption of the pathological interpretation of *κάθαρσις*, and did not regard it as unworthy of Aristotle or beneath the dignity of Tragedy.

How did Milton come by this theory of Aristotle's meaning? The question, so far as I am aware, has never been raised, but it invites discussion, unless one is prepared to believe him to have had no predecessors, and to have arrived at the above view by independent study of the Aristotelian texts.

One thing may certainly be said of his interpretation: he did not find it in any of the ordinary versions of or commentaries on the Poetics. From Valla downwards the translators had agreed in representing *κάθαρσις* by 'purgatio' or 'expiatio' or 'lustratio,' or by some equivalent periphrasis. The rendering 'expiatio' or 'lustratio' was introduced by Heinsius (1610) and Goulston (1623), who probably got it from Lambinus, but it is obvious that it must have been current in Italy even before the publication of Lambinus' version of the Politics (1567), as it is assumed in the paraphrase of the Aristotelian definition which appears in an Italian work of earlier date, the *De Poeta* of A. S. Minturnus (p. 63), printed in Venice in 1559:—

'*ut...animum a perturbationibus expiet.*'

Though a translation may often be evasive and not imply any very precise idea of the sense, I think it is pretty clear that the early translators must have taken *κάθαρσις* to mean 'purification'; that their usual rendering 'purgatio' was intended to have that sense; and that 'expiatio' and 'lustratio' were nothing but verbal improvements, which did not involve anything of the nature of a new view of the meaning of the term. The same impression is left on one by the notes of the various commentators of this period; in spite of their differences and jealousies they all manage to come round to one and the same conclusion, that the passions, or certain of them, are in some way or other 'purified' by Tragedy; they have apparently no notion of any other interpretation, or of any other possible justification of the existence of Tragedy. Most of them are duly aware of the passage in Pol. 8. 7,

1341[b] 32, but they seem to quote it only for purposes of illustration, as an interesting parallel, without any serious attempt to analyse it, or take it as the starting-point of their interpretation of the formula in the Poetics.

As soon as one turns to the Politics, however, one is not a little surprised to see that the interpretation of *κάθαρσις*, instead of always running in the same groove, as it does in the editions of the Poetics, is a point on which there is a wholesome diversity of opinion. The first rendering of the term, as used by Aristotle in Bk. VIII., was 'purificatio.' This is the word adopted by William of Morbeka, and afterwards by Aretinus; and it survives in the semi-scholastic Sylvester Maurus (1668), no doubt through its having been sanctioned and canonized by the great name of Aquinas. In the course of the 16th cent., however, it was supplanted by one or other of the following words, 'purgatio,' 'curatio,' 'lustratio,' or 'expiatio.' 'Curatio' appears as early as 1554 in Strebée's version, e.g. in his version of Pol. 8. 6, 1341[a] 22 :—

'*Hac igitur utendum temporibus iis quibus spectaculum κάθαρσιν, id est curationem affectuum, potius quam disciplinam inducere potest.*'

It is certainly not a very exact rendering for *κάθαρσις*, but it leaves us in no doubt as to one thing, the medical sense that Strebée must have attached to the term. The same view was taken by another translator of the same period, a scholar of much greater mark and importance than Strebée, the famous Spanish Aristotelian, Genesius Sepulveda. His Latin for Pol. 8. 6, 1341[a] 22 is as follows :—

'*Itaque iis temporibus utendum est tibia in quibus spectaculum ad purgationem magis quam ad disciplinam valet,*'

—on which he has a note, to remove any ambiguity there may be in this use of 'purgatio' :—

'*Purgatio intelligitur expulsio cuiuspiam affectus, ut metus, exempli gratia, vel misericordiae, quod per quosdam cantus vehementes efficitur.*'

Here 'expulsio' may possibly be a reminiscence of Horace's

use of 'expellere' in Epp. 2. 2. 137. Be this as it may, Sepulveda's version is clearly that of one who wished to give *κάθαρσις* a quasi-medical sense, and was under no temptation to give it the religious or ceremonial sense of 'expiatio' or 'lustratio,' which has been so often attached to the word both in his own and in later times. A much more definite anticipation, however, of what we now term the pathological interpretation of *κάθαρσις* is to be seen in another work on the Politics of a somewhat later date than Sepulveda's version. I have before me the Italian paraphrase of Scaino—'La Politica di Aristotile ridotta in modo di Parafrasi dal Rev. Antonio Scaino da Salo' (Rome 1578)[1], and find him giving the following as his impression of the sense and argument of Pol. 8. 7, 1342[a] 5 sqq.:—

'*Perche non è gia da dubitare, che quelle passioni dell' animo, le quali molto segnalate appariscono in alcuni, non si trovino anchora in tutto 'l resto del genere humano; ben che alcuni huomini piu, & altri meno vengano predominati da cotali affetti; quali sono la misericordia, il timore, aggiongiamo l' entusiasmo, rapto delli spiriti principali agitati da moto terribile, che passa alle volte in furore; alla qual passione, per causa d' humor peccante, non ha dubbio che alcuni vi si trovano grandemente sottoposti; si come appare di coloro, i quali col mezo de sacri canti, che s' usano per espiare & santificare l' anima, ne vengono quietati & tranquillati, quasi come per via di medicina ne fossero purgati: ilche convien che segua anchora de gl' altri huomini, che vanno soggetti, chi alla misericordia, & chi al timore, o a qualunque altra passione; i quali con l' uso di medicina appropriata all' humor peccante, ne vengono evacuati, sentendo piacere dell' alleggerimento, per la dissolutione, & evaporatione di quelli tanto vehementi affetti, che dianzi tenevano oppressi gli animi loro.*'

More important, however, for our purposes is his note (f. 219[r]), in which he incidentally shows how a theory of the tragic catharsis may be constructed on the same lines:—

[1] In Scaino Bks. VII—VIII are placed immediately after Bk. III. He had already discussed this point in a little quarto, 'Antonii Scaini Salodiens: in octo Arist. libros qui extant de repub. quaestiones' (Rome 1577).

'*... pare che, per mezo della musica, la purgatione delle passioni dell' animo s' habbi ad effettuare in questa guisa: cioè, che si come nelle medicine evacuanti s' osserva talhora d' applicar cosa, che sia conforme all' humor peccante per disporlo, & attraerlo in questo modo ad uscir del corpo, il quale si rende poi scarico di questo mal affetto, si come il reobarbaro in questa guisa purga la colera: cosi ancho ne gli affetti ridondanti dell' animo, quasi come medicina, havra forza una strampellata (per dir cosi) harmonia, che sia conforme al affetto peccante di purgar gli animi, che sono molto ripieni d'humore, dissolvendosi con l' aggionta del furore concitato di vantaggio dalla musica entusiastica...la passione interna; per non potersi piu oltre mantener insieme una tanta gran massa di humore, o colerico, o incontinente, o d'altra sorte ch' egli si sia: di che trovandosi poi gl' huomini scarichi, rimangono, come purgati che ne vengono, piu quieti quanto alle passione interne dell' animo; in quella guisa, che pare che Aristotile nel libro della poetica, trattando della tragedia, supponga che in essa mediante la paura & la misericordia, che si eccita con la rappresentatione de fatti, et casi altrui horribili, et miserabili, et col mezo del soave parlare, che mollifica gli animi de gli uditori, si venga in essi a purgare, & a moderare il soverchio dell' humor peccante in simile qualita, & a recare con questo tal alleviamento una certa tranquillita & dolcezza a gli animi delli spettatori, che si fanno in questa guisa scarichi di quelle passioni, che dianzi gli molestavano...Dove è d' avertire, che dicendo Aristotile che al cervello & all' inclinatione de mechanici & plebei si deve accommodar la musica, che sia conforme all' humore in che peccano; ci da di qua chiaramente ad intendere, che in questo modo, a simiglianza delle medicine purgative de gli humori peccanti del corpo per ragion di simpatia, si faccian anche le purgationi de gli affetti dell' animo.*'

It is not easy to follow the windings of Scaino's long and embarrassed periods. Any one, however, who has the patience to do that must see that he has given us a fairly complete view of the Aristotelian *κάθαρσις*, and that his interpretation is in its essentials identical with that of Weil and Bernays and their followers. (1) His primary assumption is that the

emotions are analogous to the humours, and under certain circumstances to the peccant humours of the body; in other words he has perceived the 'humoral' theory underlying the Aristotelian statement quite as clearly as Doering (*Kunstlehre des Aristoteles*, p. 322) has done in our own time. (2) He supposes the cathartic music to act on a certain kind of peccant humour of the soul as a sort of 'medicina evacuante' or 'purgativa.' Similar terms are more than once used by M. Weil in his original paper (*Verhandlungen der zehnten Versammlung deutscher Philologen* (etc.) *in Basel*, p. 139). (3) The music is said to be a 'medicina conforme' or 'appropriata all' humor peccante,' and to work 'per ragion di simpatia'—an anticipation, I take it, of Milton's so-called homeopathic comparison. (4) The result of the process is said to be the relief of the soul from its burden of emotion and its restoration to peace and calm. Here the Italian 'scarichi' is a very direct anticipation of the 'erleichternde Entladung' of Bernays. All this relates primarily to the well-known passage in the Politics (8. 7, 1341^{a} 32 sqq.) on the cathartic music; but it will be observed that Scaino is able to express the effect of Tragedy in very similar terms: Tragedy is said to stir up ('eccita') the emotions of pity and fear, and purge away their superabundance; and the result is a certain tranquillity of soul, as soon as the burden of emotion has been taken off. If Scaino had worked out his interpretation in detail by a formal discussion of the texts on which it was based, he would, I think, have left but little to be done by his Nineteenth-century successors.

Scaino must have been no inconsiderable figure among the Aristotelian scholars of his day, for he wrote on the Ethics, Physics, Metaphysics and De Anima, as well as on the Politics. It is very difficult, therefore, to account for the persistent neglect of his view of *κάθαρσις* by the whole tribe of professional interpreters of the Poetics, by his own countrymen Riccoboni (1587) and Beni (1613), just as much as by Heinsius and Goulston. His theory, however, seems to have outlived their conspiracy of silence, and to have met with some acceptance at any rate in Italy. I infer this from the fact that in the early years of the following century a view indistinguishable

from Scaino's is to be found in a work by Tarquinio Galluzzi, one of the lights of the Jesuit order of this period. As he was Rector of the Greek College at Rome from 1631 to 1649, Galluzzi must have been living and teaching at Rome in 1638, the year we remember as that of Milton's Italian journey.

Galluzzi's interpretation of *κάθαρσις* has been overlooked by Doering and others, no doubt through the accident of its being hidden away in a volume with the somewhat unpromising title, 'Tarquinii Gallutii Sabini e societate Iesu Virgilianae Vindicationes & Commentarii tres de Tragoedia Comoedia Elegia' (Rom. 1621). The affinity between his view and that of Scaino may be seen from the following passage in his Chapter on the 'End of Tragedy' (p. 251):—

'*Cum ex definitione intelligitur, id Tragoediae propositum esse, ut duos illos animi nostri purget affectus, commiserationem, ac metum, videndum erit, quibus potissimum praesidiis id consequatur. Sed tamen ante constituamus oportet, quid sit, affectus, sive morbos animi purgare. Explanavit hoc Arist. ipse in Politicorum octavo lib. cap. vii. Ubi cum pronunciasset, Musicam purgandis affectibus utilem esse, quid eo purgationis nomine intelligi vellet, ita declaravit. Nam affectus, inquit, qui animos movent, omnibus insunt; differunt tamen eo, quod alios magis, alios minus exagitant, ut misericordia, & metus; atque adeo etiam furor. nam huic quoque commotioni nonnulli obnoxii sunt, quos cantibus sacris sedari videmus, veluti purgationem nactos, & medicinam. Haec ille. quibus significat, in affectibus animi nostri exuperantiam quandam esse, ei plane similem, quae in corporis humoribus est, cum incommoda valetudine laboramus. Quemadmodum ergo medicamentorum vi absterguntur humores, & aegrotantium corpora ea levantur exuperantia, quae procreat morbos, sic affectus vehementissimi, & quodammodo redundantes abstergi, purgariq. possunt adeo, ut animus omni prorsus aegrotatione liberetur. Id igitur ait Aristoteles Tragoediam agere, ac veluti finem intueri: ut sicut affecta corpora purgatis, atque abstersis curantur humoribus, ita animum sanet ipsa, duobus affectibus nominatim, commiseratione, ac metu purgatis, hoc est, ab ea liberatis exuperantia, a qua animi quaedam aegrotatio promanabat.*'

My only reason for thus quoting Galluzzi is in order to show that a pathological theory of the effect of Tragedy was certainly not unknown in Italy in Milton's time; it is hardly worth while to speculate as to how Milton himself may have come to know of it—whether from a book or through conversation with some learned friend of his in Rome or elsewhere. The truth is that some such theory seems to have long been in the air in Italy. In proof of this I may perhaps be permitted to give one more quotation from Italian literature, this time however from a well-known Italian classic, the *Galateo* (1558) of Giovanni della Casa:—

'*Quantunque, secondo che io udii gia dire ad* [*da?*] *un valente huomo nostro vicino, gli huomini habbiamo molte volte bisogno si di lagrimare, come di ridere: & per tel cagione egli affermava essere state da principio trovate le dolorose favole, che si chiamarone Tragedie; accio che raccontate ne theatri, come in quel tempo si costumava di fare; tirassero le lagrime a gli occhi di coloro, che haveano di cio mestiere; & cosi eglino piangendo della loro infirmità guarissero*' (f. 12^{v}, ed. 1559).

—Or as the old Elizabethan translator of the *Galateo* puts it:—

'*Albeit not long since I heard it said to* [*?*] *a worthy gentleman our neighbour that men have many times more need to weepe then to laugh. And for that cause, he said, those dolefull tales which we call tragedies were devised at first, that when they were plaid in the Theatres* (*as at that time they were wont*) *they might draw fourth tears out of their eyes, that had need to spend them. And so they were by their weeping healed of their infirmitie.*'

The view which Casa is reproducing in this passage is certainly very far removed from the conventional justification of Tragedy current in his time; it is in fact only the therapeutic interpretation of *κάθαρσις παθημάτων* in a slightly altered form, and as such, it may very well be regarded as a reminiscence of the teaching of some nameless forerunner of Scaino and Galluzzi. Some such interpretation, therefore, must have been already in existence in Italy even in the days of Casa. Without insisting on this, however, I think the

other evidence to which I have drawn attention may suffice to show that the Bernaysian theory had been to a certain extent anticipated by more than one Italian scholar, and that Milton does not stand so completely alone among the precursors of Bernays as is usually supposed. His words in the preface to *Samson Agonistes* are no proof of his having broken ground for himself, or excogitated a new interpretation of the Aristotelian text.

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